

DEAR ELECTED OFFICIALS ...

Editor's note: The LWVSC co-presidents sent this letter to our state leadership on June 4.

**DEAR GOVERNOR MCMASTER,
SENATOR PEELER AND
SPEAKER LUCAS:**

South Carolina has a long and complex history, but throughout our history there is a constant thread – race. That theme has been recognized in political debates about educational reform, about access to health care, about employment opportunities, and much more. Today in this time of national mourning we write from our deep concern for the future of South Carolina and our nation. We are confident that you share our hopes that our state will provide a safe home where all its people can flourish. We wish to offer some thoughts on a route forward.

The current upheaval in our country points first of all toward the need for criminal justice reform and for attention to the underlying culture in our law enforcement agencies. We know that both legislators and members of the executive branch are working on these issues in South Carolina, and we support and applaud these efforts. We look also to the bigger picture.

The League of Women Voters' vision is of "a democracy where every person has the desire, the right, the knowledge, and the confidence to participate in government." We are always deeply concerned about access to the ballot as one of our most fundamental civil rights issues. We greatly appreciate your support

for expanded absentee voting in the June primaries to protect the health and safety of citizens. We very much hope that you will extend that protection to the November elections, when COVID-19 will surely remain with us. South Carolina must take every available measure to ensure that all of our elections are accessible, safe, and fair to all citizens.

We also hope that access to the resources that allow citizens to prosper will be improved. There are serious racial inequities in South Carolina in education, in employment opportunities at a fair living wage, in health care and much more. Both immediate and long-term efforts to ensure fair access to a productive and secure life for all our citizens are needed.

We also ask that you reject efforts to make our nation and our state less responsive to the needs of Black and other minority citizens. We are especially concerned about resolutions such as H. 3125 and S.112 in support of a federal constitutional convention to, among other things, "limit the power and jurisdiction of the federal government" and, as supporters frequently say, "rein in federal overreach." Those of us who were alive during the civil rights struggles of the 1960's know this language all too well. The meaning was certainly recognized by Black legislators on the House Judiciary Committee during debate on H.3125. This call for broad restrictions on federal power would very intentionally gut the ability of the federal government to work for civil rights and justice for all citizens. Please reject measures in support of a

federal constitutional convention and send a message that South Carolina respects the role of our federal government in protecting the rights and well-being of all of our citizens.

Thank you for your attention to our concerns and for your continuing leadership.

Sincerely yours,

*Holley Ulbrich, Co-president,
League of Women Voters of
South Carolina*

*Christe McCoy-Lawrence, Co-president,
League of Women Voters
of South Carolina*

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Co-president's Message: Moments of Hope

An organization I am familiar with begins each meeting by asking participants if they have a “moment of hope” they want to tell the group about. In these frightening and unsettling times, such a request may seem daunting, but this spring two noteworthy events took place in South Carolina that can indeed be described as hopeful. Both related to the dangers posed by crowded in-person voting in upcoming elections.

One was a mounting and widespread outcry for our political leaders to take action to protect both voters and poll workers from the clear danger entailed in requiring almost all voters to cast their ballots on Election Day, spending time in close proximity to strangers and in enclosed spaces. The specter of Wisconsin’s spring primary loomed — where a lack of poll workers necessitated the closing of precincts, increasing manifold the crowds and long lines at the few remaining precincts open.

LWV members were asked to write letters — actual, old-fashioned letters — urging action, especially expanded absentee and in-person voting criteria, for the elections.

The second was a remarkable one-day leap to action in our General Assembly on May 12, responding to that outcry.

Many groups were calling for action, including most significantly the State Election Commission and SCARE (the SC Association of Registration and Election Officials), and two groups had started legal action. But the League of Women Voters also played a significant role — through op-eds, letters to the editor, TV and other media interviews, outreach to other organizations, and an unusual letter-writing campaign waged by LWV members as well as many associates who got the word.

Since the General Assembly was shut because of the pandemic, with its offices and phones unstaffed, the only way to reach legislators directly was through the US Post Office. LWV members were supplied with the home addresses of their

legislators and asked to write letters — actual, old-fashioned letters — urging action, especially expanded absentee and in-person voting criteria, for the 2020 elections. And LWVSC and our local Leagues across the state spread news of this initiative widely to our coalition partners, local community groups, churches, and others, along with the links enabling them to find their legislators’ home addresses. The consequence was an outpouring of letters into the representatives’ and senators’ homes.

On May 12, the General Assembly gathered for what turned out to be a one-day session. The main order of business was passing the continuing resolution to keep the government running after June 30, but there were also many other pressing issues. Despite the time pressure, a groundswell developed for action to respond to the many calls for safeguarding our upcoming elections. After a couple of false starts and considerable drama, both

the House and the Senate unanimously passed legislation late in the afternoon that created a “State of Emergency” criterion for voting absentee — by mail or early in-person — available to all registered voters for the June Primary!

We are used to thinking of legislators as slow-moving, as deliberating endlessly, as reluctant in this highly partisan era to act across the aisle — what an exciting spectacle it was to witness the SC General Assembly on Tuesday, May 12, 2020, when it as a body resolved to **Do Something** about the clearly defined danger that loomed ahead!

We are also used to thinking of “activism” as clicking a link to “sign” an online petition or pre-composed email, or perhaps calling a legislator’s office and registering a view with a staff person — efforts which take little thought or time. Here we had citizens across the



state finding pieces of paper and pens, or printing out typed letters, locating postage stamps and envelopes, and conveying their letters to a mail box or post office! There were many wonderful stories connected to this effort — the member who spoke via Zoom to a community group, was besieged with requests for talking points from the audience, many of whom were ready to write letters that afternoon. And learning later that two members of the group had decided to serve as poll workers. And another member whose minister put out word of the letter-writing project from the pulpit and also by including it in the church bulletin.

Let’s not lose sight of these two remarkable events — and their results — in the midst of the physical, social, and economic calamities of these months. Individual action is important. Moments of hope are important.

— *Christe McCoy-Lawrence,*
LWVSC Co-president

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Email: LWV of South Carolina.

*If you do not receive these, please let us know
(send to lwvsc.cml@gmail.com).*

Facebook: League of Women
Voters of South Carolina.

Website: lwvsc.org

CELEBRATING THE SUFFRAGE CENTENNIAL DURING A PANDEMIC

The best laid plans of mice and women often go awry. Right? The original August 22, 2020 plan was to celebrate the centennial of women's suffrage with a march and rally in downtown Columbia. Mother Nature had other plans.

The League is a fact-based organization. League leaders do not think there will be a COVID-19 vaccine by August.

In consultation with the LWV Columbia Area board of directors, state co-presidents Holley Ulbrich and Christe McCoy-Lawrence, and Keller Barron (chair of the state centennial committee) it was decided to change the march and rally to a safer celebration. We are now planning a vehicle-only parade through downtown Columbia, with a noisy pause in front of the state capitol by each car, truck or motorcycle.

The impetus is for all participants and spectators to be safe. Our cars and trucks will keep us socially distant. In addition, in our vehicles Mother Nature cannot torment us as much with August heat, humidity and/or rain.

Local leagues are invited to have similar caravan parades and celebrations at their Court House squares or other locations. **OR**, all league members are welcome to join us in Columbia for the August 22, 2020, vehicle parade and celebration the state League and the Columbia Area are planning. August 22 is a Saturday. The official centennial anniversary is Wednesday, August 26th.

As of this writing, many of the details for our caravan parade and celebration are still being planned. We eventually will identify a location at which cars will convene, hire security, and plan our route. Decorations, music, photo opportunities, and other appropriate (yet safe) aspects of the parade will evolve as we start putting the pieces of the new plan into place.

Please look for emails and MailChimp messages throughout the summer with

updates about the Centennial Caravan Parade. Information will also be on the state League web site and the Columbia Area web site.

In mid to late July an Event Bright or other appropriate RSVP system will be set up. Please let us know if you are coming to Columbia and how many vehicles will be in your contingent. Planners will need an estimate of how many vehicles to expect at the parade.

We will have fun despite COVID-19. It is important to honor our foremothers who won the right to vote, the activists who continued the battle on many fronts to fulfill the dreams of equal suffrage for people of color, first nation people, poor people, and people with disabilities and special needs.

Specifics about our parade will be forthcoming. Read your emails, newsletters, and Mailchimp messages this summer!

— *Laura R. Woliver, President,
Columbia Area League*



Redistricting Update

Due to the pandemic, all non-essential legislative action has ground to a halt, including the bills we were advocating for to reform South Carolina's redistricting process. It is now nearly certain that there will not be action in time for this decade's redistricting process.

In January, LWVSC lobbyist Lynn Teague, USC election expert Duncan Buell and I met with legislative staff and started a dialogue that we hope will continue. Staffers indicated that they intend to follow an open process with significant public input.

The Census is under way now, but some deadlines have been pushed back. The process, which would normally have been completed later this summer, has been extended into the fall and data that would normally be released to states in the spring won't be available until fall. That will delay our map drawing process by some months as well.

Meanwhile, let your legislators know that you support an open process with public input, fill out your Census forms and advocate for others to do the same.

— *Matthew Saltzman, LWVSC Director for Redistricting*

K-12 EDUCATION IN SOUTH CAROLINA

LWVSC has a strong position on education developed over many years. Our basic statement of position calls for “support of public state-supported education at all levels which is high quality, effective, equitable, fully funded and accountable.”

SC Senate Bill 419 addresses several aspects of education in South Carolina. One aspect included is the assessment of social studies. How would enactment of this bill change the teaching of social studies in South Carolina?

The bill effectively removes the statewide, standards-based assessment of Social Studies that occurs once in elementary school and once in middle school. Because the policy affects accountability for student knowledge of social studies content, it is possible that it will influence when and how the subject is taught.

What are the reasons given for seeking to make this change?

A delicate balance exists between the theoretical responsibility of our schools and best practices to ensure achievement. One of the primary reasons the state has decided to propose the elimination of Social Studies as a statewide assessed subject is because of increased public outrage at heavy testing for our students.

What are the implications of such changes for the students in our public schools?

It is imperative to understand the root of standardized testing: *Accountability*. As long as state standards exist, educators will continue to teach students consistent, focused, academic content but without the state-standardized accountability measure, school districts may alter the implementation of Social Studies instruction. Over time, South Carolina

has seen the successful completion of exit examinations for Social studies become more relaxed. The lack of traditional assessment at the state level is not isolated, however. Physical Education, Music, Art, and other subject areas are not assessed to the degree that English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science are. It is critical to note that these subjects are not a pillar of school and district report cards. Keep in mind that postsecondary teacher preparation programs develop teacher candidates for social studies instruction. It is likely that emphasis within these courses will be placed on interdisciplinary approaches to subject instruction.

Educators have expressed concern about the increasingly performance-driven evaluation metrics for teachers and students at the state and national level.

What are educators saying about the possibility of this action?

As one could predict, feelings are mixed. Educators have expressed concern about the increasingly performance-driven evaluation metrics for teachers and students at the state and national level. Fueled by the knowledge of the unique makeup of schools, classrooms, and students, stakeholders reject overarching assessment systems that minimize the resources that are available to students and maximize seemingly biased assessment measures. In addition, the field is desperately seeking solutions to the teacher shortage; and by listening to teachers, stakeholders know that standardized assessment has become a thorn in the side to many. Teachers and students have expressed exhaustion with the current way

we measure knowledge acquisition. Many view the proposed removal of the subject as an assessed measure in 5th and 7th grade as a form of relief.

What should League members watch for and what action should they take when this bill comes up in the new legislative year?

The goal to reduce testing via the removal of Social Studies assessment has strong implications for the future. Section 59-18-320(B) of the 1976 Code states that, “To ensure that school districts maintain the high standard of accountability established in the Education Accountability Act, performance level results reported on school and district report cards must meet consistently high levels in all four core content areas.” I would encourage League members to ask questions that relate to how the state plans to still hold school systems accountable to all four core content areas, considering a clause that removes the subject of Social Studies as an *assessed* core subject area. I would also recommend stakeholders keep a watchful eye on all subject accountability practices.

Would this change weaken our state's attempt to instill democratic values in our students and to awaken the idea of global citizenship?

For South Carolina citizens, we may see longstanding effects of the removal of Social Studies as an assessed subject area. Democratic values and strong knowledge of historical context could be at risk. In the climate of preparing students for college and career readiness, the education field will be charged with determining whether the proposed structure supports the goal of our education system. There is value in accountability but the way we do it makes all the difference.

— Sharda Jackson Smith, LWVSC
Education Working Group

AFTER SINE DIE

THE STATE HOUSE IN THE SUMMER OF OUR DISCONTENT

Our nation is in a very difficult time. As I write this very late in May, South Carolina and the nation are beginning to re-open public functions, knowing that the COVID-19 pandemic continues. There are demonstrations across the nation in response to the murder of George Floyd, which has aptly been called a lynching. We are badly divided politically across the nation in many ways. It has become clear that 2020 is a year of great consequence, one that will live in history books. The work of the League of Women Voters has never been more important than today. Toward that end, there are issues that we must remain focused on through the summer.

Voting is always central for us, but even more so in 2020. Elections this year are of critical importance but unusual difficulty for both voters and election officials. We are very pleased to have contributed significantly to advocacy that led the General Assembly in their May 12 session to extend in-person and mail absentee voting for the June primaries and runoffs to all qualified electors. This is a major accomplishment contributing to the safety of voters and to the ability of a pandemic-strained system to work effectively. In addition, we are grateful that court action by ACLU and the NAACP Legal Defense Fund succeeded in removing the requirement of a witness signature on mailed ballots, adding to the safety of voters.

However, November elections are coming and reliable experts tell us that COVID-19 danger will continue then. We must work to ensure that when the General Assembly returns in September they act to expand absentee voting for the general election. This will be more difficult than effecting change for the June primary. False narratives that voting by mail gives one party an advantage, thoroughly debunked in systematic



studies, nevertheless influence many legislators in an election that, unlike the primaries, pits one major party against the other. There will also be a desire by many to prematurely proclaim the days of COVID-19 danger over.

Another extremely important issue that we must focus on throughout 2020 is the call for a constitutional convention intended to “rein in” the federal government, embodied in several resolutions before the South Carolina General Assembly. Dangerous at any time, a constitutional convention at this point in our nation’s history would amount to throwing a lit match into a pile of gas-soaked rags. Many states have passed these resolutions and South Carolina is now front and center in the battle to preserve our federal Constitution.

These resolutions would call a constitutional convention. Such a convention cannot be restricted in scope, but the proposals are specifically designed to develop amendments to require a balanced budget, enact federal term limits, and finally (and worst of all) greatly restrict the authority of the federal government. A particular target of these efforts is the commerce clause of the U. S. Constitution. That may sound like a simple business issue, but it is not. The commerce



clause allows the federal government to regulate private businesses across the United States. It lies at the heart of much of federal environmental protection and of every law that protects us from discrimination in private businesses, whether on the basis of race, sexual identity or preference, or any other class of humanity that a fellow citizen might wish to discriminate against. South Carolina is now a crucial battleground to defend against these resolutions. We cannot avoid this fight for the soul of our country.

And finally, we must continue to educate the public about redistricting following the census and its impact on their votes. We must have an informed and engaged public backing up efforts to ensure a transparent and accountable process in 2021. Although the task is made far more difficult since efforts to enact an independent redistricting commission in South Carolina have failed, we continue the fight to have redistricting outcomes that protect voters, not parties or incumbents.

We have a lot of work to do. “Empowering voters and defending democracy” in 2020 is not a small or easy job, but it is what the League was established to do.

— Lynn Teague, LWVSC Vice-President,
Issues and Action

LWVSC VOTER SUMMER 2020 DONORS

LWVSC thanks its members who have generously supported its advocacy and education efforts in 2019-2020. This list reflects donations through May 2020.

Arlene and Stuart Andrews	Christe McCoy-Lawrence
Carol Barker	Doris McLallen
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Janet Marsh	Laura Woliver
	Jean Wood
	Andrew Yasinsac
	Anonymous

HOME RULE

At our virtual State Council meeting in May we approved a change in the Home Rule position that will enable us to address concerns about legislative micromanagement of local governments. This revised “Umbrella statement” position is grounded in the state constitution as amended in the 1970s, specifically Article 8 which deals with local government.

The U.S. Constitution has nothing to say about local government, leaving up to the respective states to decide how much independence local governments have in taxing, spending, regulating and otherwise impacting the lives of their residents. Some states grant substantial fiscal, regulatory, and service provision authority to local governments. Others do not. South Carolina is a NOT state.

If you don’t like cities telling you what you can and cannot do (like urban chickens, for example, or noise ordinances, or zoning) you can move out into the county where the rules are fewer, the taxes are lower, and the public services more limited. But you can’t escape living in a county or a school district, and in both cases, they are heavily controlled by the General Assembly. The legislature regulates their powers to tax, limits the scope of their authority in land use decisions, appointments to county boards and commissions, the structure of school district boards and their authority to raise and spend money.

The concept of federalism that underlies the U.S. constitution has a counterpart in state-local relationships. Local governments are not one size fits all. There are small towns and big cities (not many in South Carolina, thanks to highly restrictive annexation laws). There are urban, rural, and suburban counties with different needs for infrastructure and services. There are coastal counties with unique challenges and opportunities. There are school districts with robust property tax bases and more affluent households and there are tax-poor, low income rural

school districts that struggle to stay afloat, yet the General Assembly has consistently underfunded the only state aid program for schools that distributes more to poorer districts and then criticizes them for underperforming.

Yes, it is important that the state government be aware of the different challenges in different parts of the state, but they do not necessarily have the collective wisdom or the will to solve problems that might be better defined and addressed by the elected local governments, accountable to their voters. Banning plastic bags was a particularly important issue in coastal counties worrying about polluting oceans and beaches. Big farmers have an easier time getting the General Assembly to override local land use regulations about factory farming than if they had to deal with the individual counties whose residents are impacted. Counties with lots of business and travelers and tourists need more freedom in how to spend the hospitality and accommodations tax revenues generated by those industries to address the costs they create in terms of public services. Cities and towns that wanted to have tighter regulations on social distancing during the pandemic were overridden by the governor. The list is endless.

As we prepare for the next legislative battle over respecting the competence and authority of our local elected officials, we don’t know what that issue is going to be. So we need a general statement of the principle, grounded in the Constitution. That would enable the state League to act promptly in response to local issues as they arise if they seem to contravene the obligation to honor the authority and responsibility of local governments.

Got a problem with Big Brother/Big Sister in Columbia telling your local government what to do? At least the League now has a tool that will enable us to respond in a timely manner.

— *Holley Ulbrich and Lynn Teague, LWVSC*

**MAKING
DEMOCRACY WORK.**

LEAGUE ACTIVITY COVERS THE STATE

HIGHLIGHTS

VOTER REGISTRATION

League members are registering voters everywhere from crabfests and Gullah festivals (Beaufort) to retirement centers and libraries. Thousands of voters have been registered. Charleston has voter materials in both Spanish and English and is working with a youth grant focusing on registering and getting out the vote in communities of color. Spartanburg and Greenville and Clemson Leagues have been registering at naturalization ceremonies. Columbia is working with the NAACP. Darlington is registering voters at gas stations and the IGA Grocery Store. Georgetown is registering at a clinic, a Walmart and the Georgetown Farmers Market.

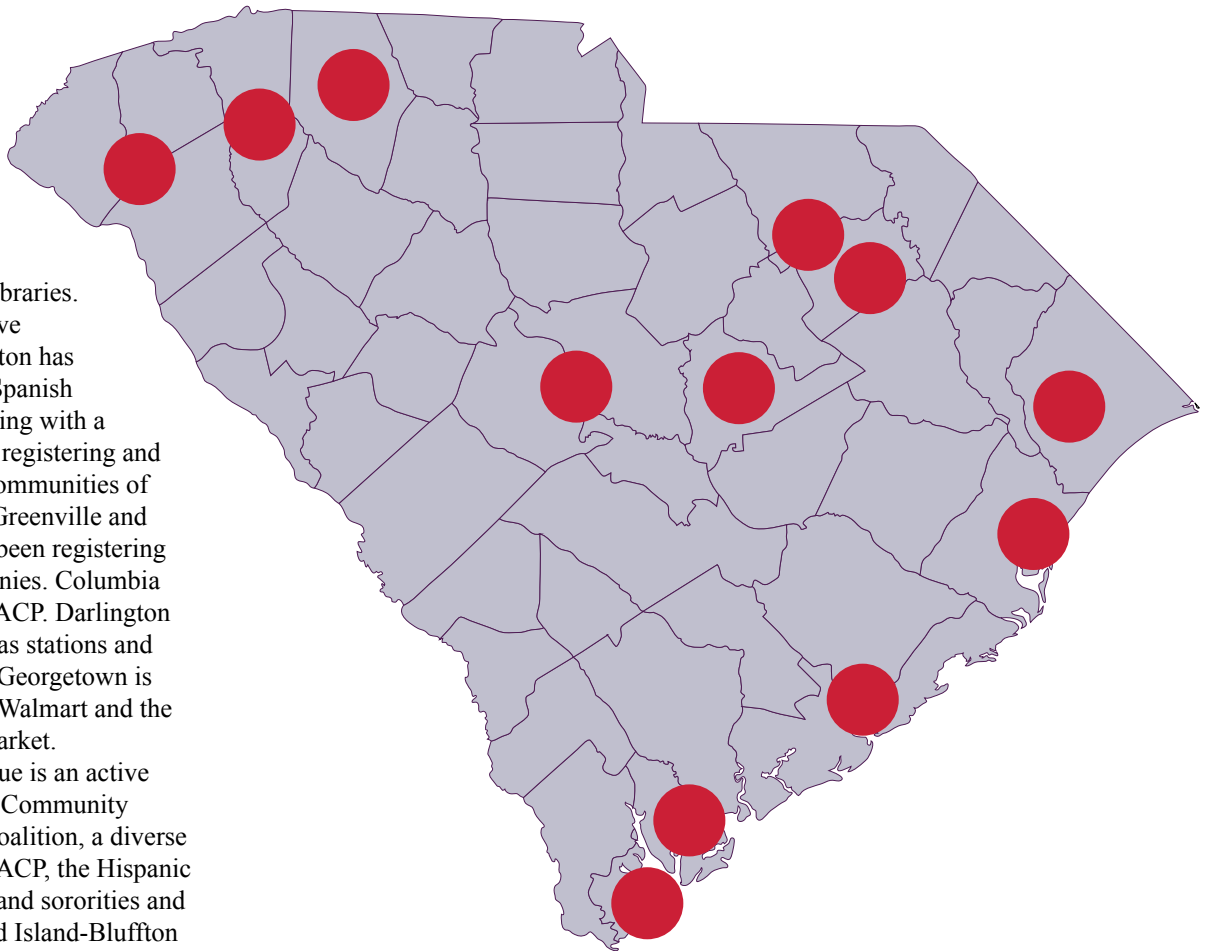
The Greenville League is an active member of Greenville's Community Voters Empowerment Coalition, a diverse group including the NAACP, the Hispanic Alliance, Upstate Pride and sororities and fraternities. Hilton Head Island-Bluffton Area received a national Youth Voter Project grant focusing on registering high school students. Their Voter Service committee has about FIFTY members! And, Sumter – 14 voter registration and education drives!

VOTER EDUCATION

Leagues are introducing voters to the new voting machines and educating citizens about the census, redistricting reform and becoming a poll worker.

CANDIDATE FORUMS

Forums were held from the mountains (Clemson) to the sea (Beaufort) this year. Charleston held ten forums co-sponsored with community partners.



VOTE411.ORG

When Leagues were not registering voters, they were giving out information about VOTE411.org. Charleston provided VOTE411 guides for 77 local races in November 2019. Greenville has participated in VOTE411 for four years in a row.

OBSERVER CORPS

Beaufort held training; Charleston set operational goals to better address observer recruiting, coaching and reporting. Columbia published reports from their observers in the newsletter.

POLICY/ISSUE PRESENTATIONS

Beaufort held postcard writing sessions; Charleston participated in community education forums; Columbia held public policy luncheons; Greenville pursued redistricting reform.

And this is just a taste of what Local Leagues are doing across the state. If you want to see more, go to LWVSC.org and take a look at the Council workbook!



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Columbia, SC 29202

SC VOTER

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Established in 1951, the League of Women Voters of South Carolina is a nonpartisan, political organization that encourages people to play an informed and active role in government. At the local, state, and national levels, the League works to influence public policy through education and advocacy. League membership is open to men and women who are at least 16 years old. All members receive the *SC Voter*, email communications and news from their local League.

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Donors will be listed in issues of the SC Voter. If you wish to remain anonymous, please check here.

Checks should be made payable to LWVSC and mailed to LWVSC, P.O. Box 8453, Columbia, SC 29202, or a donation may be made online at www.lwvsc.org.

You may donate with a one-time or recurring gift. Every little bit helps support our voter education and advocacy efforts in the Statehouse and across the state. LWVSC is a 501(c)3 organization. Your gift is tax deductible.

Thank you for your support!